

Message Text

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SUB: CONSTANTINE MITSOTAKIS: A LONG WAY BACK

1. CONSTANTINE MITSOTAKIS CONTINUES TO CAST A CONSIDERABLE SHADOW ACROSS THE GREEK POLITICAL STAGE. THIS PROJECTION IS NO MEAN TRICK AS MITSOTAKIS TODAY IS NOT A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, NOR A MEMBER OF A POLITICAL PARTY NOR BACKED BY AN ATHENIAN NEWSPAPER--THE LATTER ACCORDING TO GREEK POLITICAL WISDOM A SINE QUA NON FOR A MAN SEEKING POLITICAL INFLUENCE.

2. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO HAVE A POLITICAL CONVERSATION WITH A GREEK POLITICIAN WITHOUT THE CONVERSATION TOUCHING, AT LEAST BRIEFLY, ON MITSOTAKIS. MITSOTAKIS IS GENERALLY, AND CORRECTLY, VIEWED TO BE ATTEMPTING A COMEBACK. HE HAS RATHER FAR TO COME BACK FROM:
--MITSOTAKIS HAS BEEN IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS SINCE HE LED THE DEFECTORS FROM THE CENTER UNION--NOW GROUPED IN THE UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER--WHO FORMED THE GOVERNMENT OF THE "APOSTATES" UNDER STEPHANOPOULOS FOLLOWING THE DOWNFALL OF THE GEORGE PAPANDREOU GOVERNMENT IN JULY 1965. MANY BLAME THIS DEFECTION AND THE EVENTS WHICH PREDEDED IT (I.E. THE CRISIS BETWEEN PAPANDREOU AND THE KING OVER CONTROL OF THE ARMY) FOR OPENING THE WAY TO THE COLLAPSE OF GREEK DEMOCRACY TWO YEARS LATER;

--HE IS WIDELY SAID TO HAVE ENGAGED IN LARGE SCALE CORRUPTION WHILE
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MINISTER OF COORDINATION IN 1965.

3. BUT THOUGH THERE ARE MANY WHO MAKE SUCH ACCUSATIONS AGAINST MITSOTAKIS, THERE ARE FEW WHO WOULD DENY HIS ABILITIES. THERE IS AGREEMENT AMONG POLITICIANS OF MANY COLORS THAT MITSOTAKIS IS A MAN OF UNUSUAL INTELLECT AND LEADERSHIP ABILITY. EVEN HIS ENEMIES DESCRIBE HIM AS A MAN WHO IS CUT FROM BETTER TIMBER THAN MOST OF THE

OTHER CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL FIGURES. INDEED MITSOTAKIS' TALENTS HAVE MADE HIS COMEBACK MORE DIFFICULT, ESPECIALLY SINCE THOSE CLOSE TO CARAMANLIS AND THOSE IN THE OPPOSITION WHO FANCY THEMSELVES AS LIKELY SUCCESSORS TO CARAMANLIS SEE HIS RESURRECTION AS A THREAT TO THEIR OWN FUTURES. FOR THIS REASON, HE IS CURRENTLY SHUT OUT OF BOTH THE CARAMANLIS ADMINISTRATION AND OUT OF THE OPPOSITION UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER. (DURING THE JUNTA YEARS MITSOTAKIS DEVELOPED A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH CARAMANLIS IN PARIS. IT WAS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT HE WOULD JOIN CARAMANLIS IN ANY POST-JUNTA GOVERNMENT--AND MITSOTAKIS HAS CONFIRMED THIS PRETTY MUCH TO US. HOWEVER, CARAMANLIS HAD TO DROP THE IDEA, REFUSING TO ACCEPT MITSOTAKIS ON THE NEW DEMOCRACY TICKET IN THE NOVEMBER 1974 ELECTIONS--ALTHOUGH OTHER APOSTATES WERE ACCEPTED--BECAUSE OF VERY STRONG OPPOSITION TO MITSOTAKIS WITHIN THE ND PARTY. FOR THEIR PART, HIS FORMER COLLEAGUES IN THE CENTER UNION--NOW UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER--CONTINUE TO HARP UPON HIS "BETRAYAL" OF GEORGE PAPANDREOU.)

4. FOR OVER TWO YEARS MITSOTAKIS HAS BEEN TRYING TO DISSIPATE THE CLOUD OF HIS PAST AND CLIMB BACK INTO GREEK POLITICS. HE RAN UNSUCCESSFULLY FOR DEPUTY IN 1974. AS AN INDEPENDENT HE WAS A VICTIM OF THE GREEK ELECTORAL LAW RATHER THAN THE ELECTORATE: IT WAS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR AN INDEPENDENT TO BE ELECTED IN THAT ELECTION. CURRENTLY HIS EFFORTS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

--HE IS SEEKING WITH THE HELP OF HIS FRIEND PAUL VARDINOYANNIS TO BUILD A PRO-MITSOTAKIS ORGANIZATION THROUGHOUT CRETE WHICH COULD WEAKEN UDC STRENGTH THERE. EVIDENTLY THEY PLAN TO TRANSFORM THIS ORGANIZATION INTO A POLITICAL PARTY WHICH WOULD CLAIM TO BE THE "TRUE HEIR" OF THE LIBERAL, VENIZELIST TRADITION THAT DOMINATES THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ISLAND (CRETAN UDC DEPUTY NIKITAS VENIZELOS HAS RECENTLY TAKEN LEGAL STEPS TO BLOCK MITSOTAKIS FROM APPROPRIATING THE TITLE OF HIS GRANDFATHER'S OLD LIBERAL PARTY.) HE HAS OPENED POLITICAL OFFICES ACROSS THE ISLAND AND APPARENTLY DEVOTES A PORTION OF HIS TIME TO DOING FOR CRETANS THOSE SMALL FAVORS THAT ARE THE BREAD AND BUTTER OF GREEK POLITICIANS. MITSOTAKIS' IMMEDIATE AIM SEEMS TO BE TO GET HIMSELF ELECTED AS THE PREEMINENT DEPUTY FROM CRETE WHEN ELECTIONS ARE NEXT HELD IN GREECE.

--HE HAS OPENED A LARGE OFFICE IN DOWNTOWN ATHENS WHOSE PRIMARY FOCUS SEEMS TO BE HELPING CRETANS WHO ARE WRESTLING WITH THE ATHENIAN BUREAUCRACY, BUT IT ALSO AIMS AT A LARGER NATIONAL CONSTITUENCY;

--HE IS COURTING DEPUTIES FROM CRETE AND FROM ELSEWHERE WITH A VIEW TO BRINGING THEM INTO A MITSOTAKIS-LED POLITICAL PARTY;

--HE IS RUMORED--ONCE AGAIN--TO BE PREPARING TO LAUNCH HIS OWN NEWSPAPER IN ATHENS, POSSIBLY THIS FALL.

5. BOTH PERSONAL INCLINATION AND THE DYNAMICS OF GREEK POLITICS SEEM TO ORDAIN THAT MITSOTAKIS' MOST LIKELY POLITICAL HOME WILL BE ON THE CENTER OR THE CENTER RIGHT, AND IN FACT HE HAS TOLD US THAT THIS IS THE CONSTITUENCY HE IS SEEKING. SOMETHING OF A LIBERAL IN HIS YOUTH, AND A MAN WHO CAMPAIGNED AGAINST THE US PRESENCE ON CRETE YEARS AGO, MITSOTAKIS HAS APPARENTLY LEFT SUCH YOUTHFUL OPINIONS BEHIND. IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH US, HE HAS CLEARLY STATED THAT HE FORESEES HIS OPPORTUNITY IN THE MOBILIZATION OF MODERATES AND, INITIALLY, THOSE WHO ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE LEADERSHIP AND THE POSITIONS OF THE UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER, AND ALSO DEFECTORS FROM CARAMANLIS. BASED IN REPUBLICAN, ANTI-MONARCHICAL CRETE IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR MITSOTAKIS TO LINK UP WITH THE ROYALIST RIGHT; TO DO SO WOULD ONLY FURTHER TARNISH HIS IMAGE AND REDUCE HIS CREDIBILITY. THE FAR LEFT IS ALREADY SPOKEN FOR EVEN IF MITSOTAKIS WERE INCLINED TO SEEK HIS PLACE TO THE LEFT OF CENTER. THUS, WITH THE BULK OF THE GREEK ELECTORATE LYING
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IN THE CENTER AND THE RIGHT, IT WOULD SEEM THAT AS MITSOTAKIS LOOKS TO THE POST-CARAMANLIS PERIOD, HE WILL PROBABLY FIND HIS NATURAL HOME AMONG THE MODERATE, WESTERN ORIENTED ELEMENTS OF THE ELECTORATE, WHO STILL LOOK TO THE UNITED STATES FOR LEADERSHIP AND SECURITY.

6. THERE ARE SOME IN GREECE WHO ARE TODAY CONVINCED THAT MITSOTAKIS IS THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION "AFTER CARAMANLIS WHO?" THEY WOULD SEEM PREMATURE IN THEIR JUDGMENT. WHETHER THIS OBVIOUSLY EXCEPTIONAL MAN OVERCOMES THE MANY BARRIERS IN HIS PATH DEPENDS NOT ONLY ON HIS OWN INDIVIDUAL ABILITY BUT ALSO ON SUCH UNKNOWNNS AS THE FUTURE SHAPE OF GREECE'S ELECTORAL LAW, PARTICULARLY AS IT AFFECTS SMALL PARTIES. BUT THE FLAME OF HIS AMBITION IS STRONG, AND HE HAS THE TALENTS TO FUEL IT. THUS, WHILE IT IS TOO EARLY TO COUNT HIM IN, IT WOULD EQUALLY BE A MISTAKE TO COUNT HIM OUT COMPLETELY.
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